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ABSTRACT

Establishment of identity represents a normative developmental crisis at adolescence. It is commonly speculated that adopted adolescents find resolution of the identity crisis especially difficult. Some theorists and researchers suggest that adoptees who search for information about their birth heritage have failed to make satisfactory progress toward identity formation. Resolution of Erikson's identity/diffusion and intimacy/isolation crises was explored in relation to adoptive and search motivation status modified by selected family and personal attributes. Subjects were 83 adoptees and 81 nonadoptees between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Multiple analysis of covariance showed development varied more with family and personal attributes (sex, age, anxiety, and family conflict) than with adoptive or search status. Results did not reveal sex differences for identity/diffusion, but females were more advanced than males in resolving the intimacy/isolation crisis. Based on these findings, speculation that adoptees are less successful in resolving the identity/diffusion crisis seems unwarranted, and search motivation appears more a concomitant of capacity for intimacy than deficiency in identity resolution. (Author/NB)

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Adoptees' Resolution of the Adolescent Identity Crisis: Where are the Taproots?

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Running Head: IDENTITY AND ADOPTEES

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Abstract

Using 18- to 35-year-old adoptees (N=83, 58 females, 25 males) and nonadoptees (N=81, 57 females, 24 males), resolution of Erikson's identity/diffusion and intimacy/isolation crises was explored in relation to adoptive and search motivation status modified by selected family and personal attributes. Multiple analysis of covariance showed development varied more with family and personal attributes, (especially sex, age, anxiety, and family conflict) than with adoptive or search status. Results did not reveal sex differences for identity/diffusion but females were advanced in resolving the intimacy/isolation crisis. Speculation adoptees are less successful in resolving the identity/diffusion crisis seems unwarranted, and search motivation appears more a concomitant of capacity for intimacy than deficiency in identity resolution.

Adoptees' Resolution of the Adolescent Identity Crisis: Where are the Taproots?

Establishment of identity represents a normative developmental crisis at adolescence, precipitated by the interaction of biological and social forces (Erikson, 1956, 1963, 1968). Central to this process is the need to integrate one's past, present, and future into a coherent identity. Not until adolescence do individuals develop the necessary capacities to accomplish this task, and for most young Americans it is a lengthy, difficult struggle continuing well into early adulthood.

It is commonly speculated that adopted adolescents find resolution of the identity crisis especially difficult. Erikson's warning that a sense of roots might be lost if it were not firmly established in life cycles, seems to support this viewpoint; "For man's true roots are nourished in the sequence of generations and he loses his taproots in developmental time, not in abandoned localities" (Erikson, 1964, p.96). The motivation of some adoptees to search for the source of their biological taproots has been interpreted as being indicative of especially profound difficulties in identity formation.

However, since both biological and social forces are proposed to precipitate the normative identity crisis, perhaps the special characteristics of the adoptive experience can serve as a particularly powerful catalyst toward integration of past and future. A possibility of greater motivation seems implied by

Dorothy Roger's (1977, p. 55) statement that, "Youth who are aware that they were adopted may have special needs for identity . . . their chief need is to establish their identity."

It seems questionable to assume that the greater complexity and difficulty of the adoptee's task automatically leads to less successful resolution of the adolescent identity crisis. Indeed, on the contrary, evidence from research on learning suggests that having to expend more effort to master a specially difficult task can result in greater success than is achieved on an easier task requiring less effort (Kolers, 1976); difficulty and complexity do not guarantee failure.

Further, instead of lower levels of identity formation, motivation to search for one's biological roots may actually demonstrate achievement of a relatively firm sense of self. Erikson has proposed that only when identity formation is well on its way can there be a fusion of identities in an intimate relationship; adolescents who are not sure of their identity shy away from interpersonal intimacy as it is too threatening to risk a shaky identity in such a merging (Erikson, 1968). It has been said that ". . .we can be truly together only when each of us can handle the challenge of being singular." (Yamamoto, 1986, p. 19). Perhaps it would also be taking too great a risk to expose a shaky identity to the perilous quest for integration of the adoptive and biological selves. It is possible that search motivation has positive rather than negative implications concerning the degree of identity resolution accomplished.

While support for both optimistic and pessimistic speculation regarding adoptees' identity process is implicit in Erikson's theory, the difficulties involved in testing Erikson's hypotheses have left the issue unclarified.

Identity as a Developmental Process

Erik Erikson has been the foremost contributor to an expansion of the concept of identity as a unique developmental process continuing over the entire life cycle. He uses the term identity to denote "certain comprehensive gains which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all of his pre-adult experience in order to be ready for the tasks of adulthood" (Erikson, 1956, p. 56). As the adolescent looks toward the future s(he) is committed to a synthesis of past and future; "a synthesis which must include but transcend the past" (Erikson, 1956, p. 98). He wrote that the key problem of identity is "the capacity of the ego to sustain sameness and continuity in the face of changing fate" (1964, p. 96), aptly described by an unknown sage as, "I'm not what I once was but I am what I was once."

Erikson's view of the establishment of identity as a developmental process is the dominant model and other developmental psychologists have largely offered amendments and expansions to his ideas. Muuss (1975) emphasizes that the production of a meaningful self-concept involves a linking together of past, present, and future. Josselson (1980) also

suggests that the adolescent developmental crisis involves integrating the past and the future aspects of self into a coherent whole. Identity provides a feeling of wholeness and self-consistency of integration with a perception of self as stable over time (Mussen, Conger, & Kagan, 1980), and a view of self as a distinctive individual. Rogers (1969) described identity as a sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness from others resulting in a strong self-image and insistance on the right to be oneself.

The Process in Adoptees

There is considerable concensus among developmentalists that identity formation at adolescence is, in many respects, determined by what went on before and by what will follow. It is commonly speculated that resolution of this crisis is an even more complex task for adopted adolescents. As they attempt to integrate past with future, they are hindered by existence of two sets of parents; they experience an absence of generational sequence (Josselson, 1980) as a consequence of uprootedness. It is more difficult to link together past, present, and future if the past has lost the anchorage of family tradition (Muuss, 1975). Adoptees not only must form a synthesis of past and future but must also integrate the now with those parts of self that have been left in the past. The adoptee recognizes that s(he) was not simply invented at adoption; that biological origins are a part of the past. Josselson has stated that for adolescents, " the worst ego

experience is not failure but uncertainty" (1980, p. 201); and to be adopted has been equated with uncertainty about one's past. For adolescents who feel little need to integrate past and future, the fact of adoption may cause little interference. But for those who are highly motivated toward integration, adoption may present a formidable barrier.

Research on Adoptees and Identity

Although there are theoretical and intuitive bases for assuming adoptees experience greater identity formation problems, the literature concerning the relationship between adoption and the identity formation process contains no firm empirical evidence directly supporting this assumption. Unfortunately, earlier studies not directly investigating this relationship were frequently interpreted as if they had yielded evidence supporting the assumption (Clothier, 1943; Frisk, 1964; Sants, 1964; Schechter, 1960; Simon & Senturia, 1966; Stone, 1972; Tec, 1967) and even recently numerous authors have expressed this unsubstantiated opinion, lending it authenticity (e.g., Brinich, 1980; Cava, 1979; Schuster & Ashburn, 1980; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1975). In earlier studies variables such as personality traits, self esteem, or self concept were often labeled "identity" and findings interpreted as applying to the developmental process of identity. Even the Committee on Adoptions of The American Academy of Pediatrics (1971) issued the following statement: " . . . certain differences influence the life of an adopted child; most

important are those related to ego identity. Determining identity is a difficult process for someone brought up by his natural parents; it is more complex for the individual whose ancestry is unknown to him" (1971, p. 948). If the process is more complex, difficult, and important for adoptees perhaps they actually work harder at the task, and make equal or greater progress than nonadoptees.

General Research on Identity

Family Relationship Influences

Inferences have also been made concerning family relationship influences on identity resolution in adoptees, but the studies finding family factors related to adolescent identity resolution have used general population samples, not samples of adoptees. These investigations suggest that in the general population family relationship factors such as level of cohesion (Bary, 1979; Dignan, 1963; LaVoie, 1976), expression of feelings (Donovan, 1975; Matteson, 1974), conflict (Donovan, 1975; Schilling, 1975), control (Bary, 1979; Donovan, 1975; LaVoie, 1976), and independence (Donovan, 1975; Matteson, 1974) are related to level of resolution of the adolescent identity crisis, with higher levels of family cohesion, expression of feelings, and independence, and lower levels of control and conflict related to higher levels of identity formation.

Individual Difference Influences

There have been other inappropriate generalizations from general population studies with regard to the influence of individual differences on identity resolution in adoptees. Lower levels of anxiety appear to be related to more established identity status (Marcia, 1967; Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Oshman & Manosevitz, 1974; Schenkel & Marcia, 1972; Stark & Traxler, 1974). Higher levels of resolution also seem to be related to higher levels of autonomy (Matteson, 1977; Neuber & Guenther, 1977); Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973) and lower levels of acceptance of authority (Donovan, 1975; Matteson, 1977; Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973).

Another individual difference of interest in relation to identity formation is the capacity for intimacy which Erikson has theorized is possible only when identity formation has been satisfactorily accomplished as before this occurs it is taking too great a chance to risk one's identity in a truly intimate relationship. According to Erikson intimacy is a developmental characteristic and like other aspects of development tends to be age-related. Although there is evidence supporting the idea that in the general population higher levels of identity resolution are related to greater capacity for intimacy (Donovan, 1975; Kacerguis & Adams, 1979; Kinsler, 1972; Marcia, 1967; Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973), there are questions as to the developmental direction of this relationship.

It has been pointed out that there is a possibility of male bias in Erikson's idea that identity must precede intimacy (Stevens-Long & Cobb, 1983). For females to open a serious identity search in the occupational area they must challenge sex role stereotypes, and for males to give interpersonal dimensions the same importance they attribute to occupational decisions requires challenging the masculine stereotype. In our society males have sacrificed intimacy for identity and females have been encouraged toward the reverse process. Females seem to find identity more a matter of whom one is related to than what one is (Gilligan, 1982). Males often seem to need to be sure who they are before they can risk an intimate relationship but females believe they are more likely to become someone and discover who they are through intimate relationships. Such relationships seem to be more important to females (Hodgson & Fischer, 1979; Josselson, Greenberger, & McConochie, 1977). It has been suggested that while males develop a personal identity, females develop a "reflected" identity (O'Connell, 1976) or one that reflects wife and mother roles. Definition of self in terms of interpersonal roles has been referred to as "contingent" identity; identity is contingent on others. (Zemon-Gass, & Nichols, 1975). Levinson et al (1978) report further evidence of sex differences in that at mid-life women resume work on identity and men become more sensitive to their interpersonal needs. If individual and/or sex differences exist in the developmental sequence of these

dimensions, it seems important to identify differences and similarities in non-developmental factors related to each of them, and in their relationship with age. Again, the relationship between identity and intimacy has not been investigated with adoptive populations.

Comparisons of Adoptees and Nonadoptees

Comparisons of adoptees and nonadoptees do not yield clear clues about the identity formation process in adoptees. There has been little investigation of family relationships in the adoptive population and comparisons of adoptive and nonadoptive populations have yielded conflicting results. Reynolds, Levey, and Eisnitz (1977) found adoptees' self-ratings of their childhood experiences were almost evenly divided between satisfactory and unsatisfactory, but in the general population were likely to be about 75% satisfactory and 25% unsatisfactory. However, Ijams (1976) found no significant difference in the way the two populations view their family rearing experiences. Adoptees have been found to manifest significantly higher anxiety than do nonadoptees (Reynolds, Levey, & Eisnitz, 1977) and adoptees reporting less satisfactory family relations have demonstrated higher levels of anxiety than those reporting more satisfactory relationships. On the basis of findings regarding anxiety reported for the general population, adoptees might be expected to experience greater identity problems but the fact that adoptees have been found to score higher than nonadoptees on measures of

autonomy (Reynolds, Levey, & Eisnitz, 1977; Simmons, 1979) suggests the reverse might be the case. Comparisons of capacity for intimacy have also produced conflicting results; Ijams (1976) found no difference between adoptees and nonadoptees but Simmons (1979) reported adoptees to have less capacity for intimacy.

Search Motivation and Identity

A final assumption, that needs to be questioned concerning identity formation in adoptees is the idea that adoptees who seek information about their birth heritage can be differentiated from those who do not on the basis of differences in identity resolution. The implication is that searching indicates failure to make satisfactory progress toward identity formation; that it stems from deficiency as opposed to growth motives. It could, however, be argued that search motivation would seem to be more typical of individuals who are in a moratorium stage seeking a basis for decisions, or of those who have already become achieved, than of those who have experienced no crisis and are committed to parental values, or those who are neither committed nor struggling to arrive at adult decisions. Baran, Sorosky, and Pannor (1975) seem to perceive search as beneficial to identity formation when they report that although not all searches have happy endings, most searchers report that they feel glad they did it, that birth parents were generally pleased to reunite, and that their adoptive parents' feelings were not hurt.

As with other speculations in developmental and adoptive

literature, the direct relationship of identity formation to search motivation in adoptees remains unexplored. There is some sparse evidence that some of the factors related to identity formation in the general population, or to differences between adoptee and nonadoptee groups, may also distinguish between adoptees motivated to search and those who are not. Although Reynolds et al (1977) failed to obtain search-related differences in anxiety, Loper (1976) not only found search motivation related to greater anxiety but to less autonomy and less acceptance of authority. In addition, adoptees who search report lower levels of satisfaction with their relationship to their adoptive parents and report having received less adequate amounts of information about their birth parents from adoptive parents (Loper, 1976; Yerger, 1981). Such factors have been assumed to influence the identity process and parents have been urged to maintain open communication about adoption-related matters to reduce problems in identity formation (Commission on Adoption of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 1971; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1978). More recently Aumend and Barrett (1984) also reported lower levels of satisfaction with parents among searchers, but found searchers knew more about the medical, educational, intellectual and occupational backgrounds of their birth parents than did nonsearchers.

The Research Question

The question addressed by this study was, "Where are the

taproots of identity?" Does the primary source of nourishment lie in biological roots or in personal and/or family attributes? Do the same factors influence identity formation in adoptees and nonadoptees, and in searchers and non-searchers? And by young adulthood, do these groups demonstrate differences in development of identity and capacity for intimacy? To explore these questions, the developmental characteristics of identity, diffusion, intimacy, and isolation were assessed in female and male, young adult adoptees and nonadoptees and evaluated in relation to selected family and personal factors. The variables considered were some that had been found in earlier studies to discriminate between levels of identity in nonadoptee populations, as well as between groups of adoptees versus nonadoptees and searchers versus nonsearchers.

Method

The sample consisted of 164 Caucasian individuals in late adolescence and young adulthood ranging in age from 18 to 35: 83 adoptees (59 females, 25 males) (*M* age=25.29, *SD*=5.87), and 81 nonadoptees (58 females, 26 males) (*M* age=24.79, *SD*=5.89). Some researchers have questioned the validity of levels of identity resolution determined during early adolescence (Raphael and Xelowski, 1980) and have suggested a coherent sense of identity generally does not occur much before age 18 (Marcia, 1980). A coherent sense of identity is proposed to begin in late adolescence with the critical time for crystallization being the

late teens and early twenties (Adams & Jones, 1983; Archer, 1982). It has been recommended that identity resolution be assessed later rather than earlier in development as the key issue is whether an individual achieves identity as a basis for transition to adulthood rather than how soon it is achieved (Garbarino, 1985). For this investigation individuals in the 18 to 35 age range were assumed to have had sufficient time to work substantially toward resolution of the adolescent identity crisis.

To help control for possible confounding influences on identity resolution, the adopted population was limited to individuals who had been adopted before they were 18 months old by non-biological family members.

Participants included students attending a large, multi-purpose university and a community college in the same geographic area, as well as residents in the community-at-large with at least some college-level education.

Within the adopted and nonadopted samples, distribution of sex, age, and socioeconomic status was held as equal as possible. Socioeconomic status based on occupation of head of household, and determined from a revision of Duncan's Occupational Index (Featherman & Hauser, 1977), ranged from an index value of 8 to 96 ($\underline{M}$=47.88, $\underline{SD}$=27.07) for nonadoptees and was somewhat higher for adoptees, 9 to 93 ($\underline{M}$=56.9, $\underline{SD}$=25.4), possibly due to standards required for adoptive parents. Sex distribution and age did not differ substantially for the two groups.

Instruments

Identity. The concept of identity is complex making it difficult to gain concensus regarding operational definition of the construct. As a consequence, there is a lack of well established methodology and instrumentation to measure this concept. James E. Marcia (1966) has been one of the foremost elaborators of Erikson's identity model. He conceptualized levels of identity resolution as representing various combinations along a continuum of two dimensions, crisis and commitment. Crisis can be described as active involvement in choosing among alternatives; a period of struggle to arrive at decisions. Commitment is the degree of personal investment the individual expresses toward these decisions. Marcia used a semi-structured interview and an incomplete sentences blank to determine identity status on the dimensions of occupational choice, religion, and political ideology (Marcia, 1966). His research convinced him adolescents differ in the strategies they use for coping with this issue: 1) achieved - individuals have seriously considered alternatives, have made adult decisions on their own terms, and are committed; 2) moratorium - these persons are currently in crisis, concerned about and actively struggling to arrive at decisions; 3) foreclosed - they have not experienced crisis but have made adult commitments, usually in terms of parentally approved values; 4) and diffused - these may or may not have experienced crisis, but are not in crisis and remain uncommitted.

Although Marcia's concept of crisis and commitment as elements of the identity process are widely accepted and his categories seem congruent with Erikson's ideas, there are problems concerning the validity of using discrete categories to represent quantitative differences in identity formation, and with the assumption that differences in strategies result in differences in quality of resolution.

Therefore, identity was conceptualized in this study as a linear, quantitative continuum involving crisis and commitment with regard to global self definition as opposed to specific dimensions of identity, and no attempt was made to identify differences in strategies used or quality of resolution. However, in accord with Erikson's definition of the normative developmental crisis, the construct was viewed as two-dimensional in terms of both identity resolution and identity diffusion. Most operational definitions have conceptualized identity as a one-dimensional construct - identity resolution. Lower levels of resolution have been equated with diffusion. Erikson warned about the limitations of making "achievement scales" out of the postulated positive senses and omitting the negative senses that are the dynamic counterparts of the positive ones throughout life (Erikson, 1966, p. 274). The implication is that each person develops some amount of both the positive and negative dimensions just as each individual has some degree of femininity and of masculinity (Bem, 1974). One might attain a relatively high level of identity and

still demonstrate some evidence of diffusion. Identity was assessed with Constantinople's (1969) two dimensional scale which was designed to measure Erikson's first six developmental crises incorporating both the positive and negative senses. The test-retest reliabilities for the 12 subscales range from .45 for identity diffusion to .81 for intimacy.

Family factors. The Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1975) was used to measure five dimensions found in earlier studies to relate to identity formation in the general population, to adoptee/nonadoptee differences, and/or to differences related to search motivation in adoptees: relationship dimensions included cohesion (degree to which family members are concerned, committed, helpful and supportive), expressiveness of feelings (extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and express their feelings directly), and conflict (extent to which anger, aggression, and conflict characterize family interactions); personal growth dimensions were independence (extent to which family members are encouraged to be assertive, self-sufficient, think for themselves, and make their own decisions), and system maintenance (degree to which family rules and procedures are rigid, members order each other around, and family is organized in a hierarchical manner - degree of control). This scale has test-retest reliabilities ranging from .68 to .86.

Individual differences. Personality traits were measured by Cattell's "The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire," and

second order factors were calculated to use as measures of anxiety and autonomy/independence, found earlier to be related to identity formation, search motivation and adoptive status.

Constantinople's (1969) rating scale was used to measure the developmental characteristics of intimacy and isolation.

Search motivation. Search motivation was operationalized as the adoptees' attitudes concerning the appropriate amount of identifying and non-identifying information to be exchanged between adoptees and birth parents. Subjects selected from 5 choices ranging from "no information" to "identifying information and personal contact." Only adoptees selecting the latter choice involving personal contact were classified as motivated to search.

Attitudes

In order to compare the reported experience of adoptees with the ideas of nonadoptees concerning availability of information about the adoption, adoptees were asked to indicate by selecting one of five alternatives, how willing their adoptive parents had been to discuss with them information about their adoption, how much information they actually had possessed, and how much information they thought appropriate for adoptees to be given. Nonadoptees responded to the same questions on the basis of how willing they believed parents should be and how much information they believed adoptees should be given. In addition the perceived affective impact of adoptive status on identity formation was measured. Subjects indicated on a four point rating scale, their

level of agreement with five statements describing the affect of adoption on sense of self and personal identity. Adoptees responded from their perceived experience and nonadoptees from their expectancies.

Results

To investigate differences between adopted and nonadopted individuals in resolution of the adolescent identity crisis, a multivariate analysis of covariance was computed with adoptive status and sex as the independent variables; measures of identity, diffusion, intimacy, and isolation as dependent variables; and age, personality, and family variables as covariates. The significant results ($p<.05$) are given in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 shows that variance in developmental characteristics was best accounted for by age, family, and personality variables with the possible exception of intimacy, which tended to relate to sex differences.

Using the same dependent variables and covariates, another analysis was computed with search motivation and sex as the independent variables. Search motivated adoptees constituted 40% of the adoptee sample (N=34) including 39% of the female adoptees (N=23) and 44% of the males (N=11). This does not agree with the idea that, as future mothers, girls are more aware of generational

continuities and more concerned about search (Baron, Sorosky, and Pannor, 1975). The significant results are given in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows that even after removal of the significant contribution of family and personal variables to variance in developmental characteristics, the interaction of search motivation and sex made a further significant contribution, especially to variance in intimacy. And the unadjusted main effect for search significantly explained developmental variance.

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 reveals anxiety, age, and family conflict to be the strongest influences on developmental characteristics, and for intimacy to be more closely related to sex differences than to the other variables. It also appears that some differences between adoptees and nonadoptees may be a function of differences between search and nonsearch individuals within the adoptee population.

To aid in interpreting these results relevant means and standard deviations are given in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Adoptees and nonadoptees differed in some important ideas about the adoptive experience. They disagreed about how willing

adoptive parents are to talk with adoptees about matters related to their adoption $F(1,161)=7.53$, $p<.0068$, with adoptees reporting their adoptive parents as actually less willing to talk ($M=3.25$, $SD=.99$) than nonadoptees believed they would be ($M=3.60$, $SD=.54$). The proportion of adoptees (58.3%) who reported their adoptive parents actively encouraged them to discuss their adoption was not too different from the proportion of nonadoptees (47.0%) who believed this would be the case. However, of the remaining adoptees only 16.7% reported their adoptive parents were willing to answer questions which they initiated, and fully 25% reported their adoptive parents as either reluctant to talk (17.9%) or as never talking about it (7.1%). On the other hand, all of the remaining nonadopted individuals (43.0%) felt adoptive parents would answer questions initiated by the adoptees.

However, the two groups did not differ in their opinions about how much information should be given to adoptees, $F(1,161)=.58$, $p<.45$, with both adoptees (50.6%) and nonadoptees (49.4%) heavily favoring adult adoptees' right to obtain past and current information about their birth parents. The discrepancy between adoptees and nonadoptees with regard to information was not in their opinions as to what is appropriate but in ideas about what actually transpires in the adoptive experience.

There was a significant difference between the groups, $F(1,162)=6.13$, $p<.01$, in how they perceived the rights of birth parents with adoptees ($M=3.33$, $SD=1.61$) believing birth parents

have more rights than did nonadoptees (M=10.16, SD=4.00). They also differed in perceptions of the affective impact the adoptive status would have on identity formation, F(1,162)=20.12, p<.000, with adoptees (M=10.16, SD=4.00) viewing it less negatively than did nonadoptees (M=7.93, SD=1.97).

When adoptees were divided into searchers and nonsearchers, differences were also obtained. They differed in ideas about the affective impact of adoption on identity, F(1,81)=31.17, p<.000, with nonsearchers viewing the adoptive influence more positively (M=11.86, SD=3.43) than searchers (M=7.58, SD=3.41). Nonsearchers (M=3.52, SD=.86) reported their parents as more willing to talk than did searchers (M=2.85, SD=1.06), F(1,81)=9.99, p<.0022. On the other hand, nonsearchers reported they actually had less information (M=2.24, SD=1.44) than did searchers (M=3.30, SD=1.59), F(1,81)=9.99, p<.0022. In contrast with adoptees and nonadoptees, searchers and nonsearchers differed significantly in how much information they believed should be available to adoptees with searchers being less variable in supporting more information (M=4.72, SD=.67,) than nonsearchers (M=2.62, SD=1.64). They also differed in ideas about rights of birth parents, F(1,81)=35.46, p<.000, with searchers (M=4.42, SD=1.17) more favorable than nonsearchers (M=2.62, SD=1.45). These findings reveal that generally nonsearchers were more similar to nonadoptees than were searchers.

It should be noted that searchers were older than

nonsearchers, $F(1,81)= 33.64$, $p<.000$ (searcher $M=29.24$, $SD=5.08$; nonsearcher $M=22.78$, $SD=4.89$), and had more education, $F(1,81)=4.94$, $p<.03$ (searcher $M=3.60$, $SD=1.60$; nonsearcher $M=2.80$, $SD=1.63$).

Discussion

Adoptees vs nonadoptees

Since differences in level of resolution of the identity/diffusion crisis were not obtained between adoptees and nonadoptees, and the factors relevant to this process were generally similar for both groups, the results suggest the taproots of identity may rest more in family and personal sources than in biological continuity. Assumptions that adoptees are less successful in identity formation or differ extensively in factors influencing this process, were not supported by this study. If the earlier path toward identity was more rocky for these adoptees, they did not demonstrate any developmental disadvantage by late adolescence and early adulthood, and the key issue has been described as "whether" rather than "how soon" identity is attained (Garbarino, 1985). While it could be speculated that adoptees have a greater need to deny identity diffusion and to rely on self deception with regard to establishment of identity, such speculations seem to be based on unverified negative assumptions concerning the adoptive experience. These widespread ideas probably result from retrospective studies of adoptees with problems severe enough to require psychological or psychiatric therapy. As with retrospective studies of other special

populations, there has been a tendency to make the fallacious assumption that if troubled adoptees demonstrate identity deficiencies, adoptees generally are troubled by identity deficiencies.

The combined family and personal attributes contributed significantly to variance, not only in identity, but in diffusion and isolation as well, indicating considerable similarity in influences on development of these characteristics among both female and male adoptees and nonadoptees. Intimacy showed a different pattern as attainment varied more in relation to sex and age differences than to family and personality attributes.

It is possible that this difference reflects differences in the measurement scales. However, the finding seems to support the idea that females accomplish intimacy at earlier ages than do males (Stevens-Long & Cobb, 1983). The slower progress of males in resolving this developmental crisis was also suggested by the fact that older males exhibited higher levels of isolation than did younger but females did not show this age difference. Older males seemed more likely to be experiencing this developmental crisis that younger males had not yet reached, in contrast with the female subjects of comparable age who appear to have closed this developmental gap. It might also be noted that if females, as has been suggested, are slower to establish identity (Stevens-Long & Cobb, 1983), this sex difference was no longer evident in these 18 to 35-year-old individuals; any earlier gap

between the sexes had been closed.

There was also an adoptee/nonadoptee difference regarding isolation, indicating isolation and anxiety to be more likely to occur together in adoptees. The direction of this relationship difficult to assess as while it is possible high levels of anxiety are more likely to encourage feelings of isolation in adoptees than in nonadoptees, it is equally possible that feelings of isolation are more likely to arouse anxiety in adoptees. The experience of isolation from biological roots may lower the threshold of sensitivity to interpersonal isolation among adoptees making it more anxiety inducing; failure to establish intimacy may be experienced less negatively than failure to avoid isolation. Further research is needed to determine the relationship of anxiety and isolation in adoptees.

Searchers vs nonsearchers

As was true for adoptive status, all developmental characteristics except intimacy varied significantly in relation to the family and personal variables within the adoptee population. However, the interaction of search motivation and sex contributed significantly to developmental variance, especially intimacy, even after the effects of family and other personal factors were removed. Among nonsearchers, females demonstrated significantly higher capacity for intimacy than did males, but this sex difference did not maintain for searchers. Since searchers were older than nonsearchers, this finding seems to

reflect developmental sex differences in resolution of this crisis and to be confounded with the sex by age interaction obtained in this analysis. The age difference between searchers and nonsearchers did not seem to matter among females but the younger male nonsearchers were less likely than the older male searchers to have attained high levels of capacity for intimacy.

This raises a question as to whether search motivation is more a function of general age-related maturation or of capacity for intimacy; a question which seems to warrant further investigation. If motivation to search for one's biological roots stems from a well developed capacity for intimacy it does not appear to be a quest for identity as has been alleged; it seems less a function of developmental deficit than the outcome of developmental growth.

Among adoptees, intimacy and family conflict were negatively related in males but not in females. It has been suggested that females care more about intimate relationships than do males (Hodgson & Fischer, 1979), and if so perhaps they are motivated at younger ages to seek intimate involvements with others outside the family. If young males are more restricted to family relationships for fulfillment of intimacy needs, a conflicted family situation might have more impact on them than on females. It is also possible that sex differences in the kind of behavioral responses made to family conflict may result in greater damage to family relationships for males.

The relationship between anxiety and the negative characteristics of diffusion and isolation was significant indicating a stronger relationship among females than males, especially for isolation. Female and male adoptees also demonstrated differences in relation to anxiety with isolation and, to a lesser extent, diffusion being more strongly related to anxiety among females than males. Again, the direction of this relationship remains undefined; anxiety may make the females' developmental progress more difficult with regard to the negative characteristics, feelings of diffusion or isolation may increase their anxiety, or perhaps higher levels of anxiety and negative developmental characteristics tend to go together as a result of more fundamental causes. Further research using multivariate approaches seems needed if clusters of traits that seem to occur together are to be identified.

There was a slight tendency for anxiety to be more closely related to diffusion in nonsearchers than in searchers suggesting the possibility that in some adoptees, unwillingness to seek one's biological roots may represent an attempt to control anxiety by reducing the identity ambiguities presented by two sets of parents.

Positive and negative characteristics

The results seem to confirm that just as each individual has some masculinity and some femininity, each also has some of the negative as well as the positive developmental characteristics,

and being high on one does not correspond perfectly with being low on the other. There seem to be commonalities, as well as differences, in the factors contributing to the development of each but anxiety was more closely related to negative developmental characteristics. There was some indication that adoptees and nonadoptees may differ more in their development of the negative than of the positive characteristics.

Perception of the adoptive experience

Adoptees versus nonadoptees. Adoptees and nonadoptees showed considerable difference in their ideas about the nature and impact of the adoptive experience suggesting there is need for better communication if progress is to be made in our attitudes concerning society's regulation of adoption and adoptee rights. In general adoptees reported less opportunity to obtain information about their biological past than nonadoptees assumed to be the case. Nonadoptees seemed unaware of what might be called the "closed record psyche"; the fact that many adoptive parents do not have much information about the biological heritage of their adopted child, and that they also sometimes feel threatened and fear competition for the love of their child if the biological past should become a reality. However, it is possible that adoptees, even when given reasonable amounts of information, perceive this information in the void of a vast, unexplained past which makes the information seem inadequate.

Both groups agreed adoptees should receive maximum

information suggesting the nonadoptees either foretell a new generation of pro-open-record citizens, or were too young to empathize with the fears and concerns of parents, either adoptive or biological. Being young themselves they may identify with the adoptees' rights rather than the parents' rights. This seems supported by the fact that the groups' ideas differed as to the rights of birth parents for information about the adoptees. Nonadoptees seemed more punitive; in essence conveying the impression of feeling that when birth parents gave up their child they gave up their rights. But the adoptees seemed by empathy to share the experience of biological discontinuity with their birth parents, and to recognize some fundamental right to establish generational continuity that superceded any perceived parental failure. It is also possible that some adoptees hoped their biological parents would seek them out, thus relieving them of taking the initiative, reducing the risk of their hurting the adoptive parents, and partially countering the evidence of their original rejection.

Adoptees were also more positive than nonadoptees about the effects of adoption on identity formation, and did not view the adoptive experience as having been a major stumbling block toward resolution of their identity crisis. It is always tempting to assume that positive responses represent denial or repression of negative experiences, but it is also possible that this group of older adolescents and young adults had moved beyond the point in

development where the adoptive experience presented an overwhelming difficulty; that they had worked through the ambiguities to a satisfactory level and that, as in childbirth, the painful experiences had been lost in the past. It may be that nonadoptees reared in their biological families overestimate the importance of hereditary similarity and underestimate the influence of the rearing family, since they have no way to assess the relative impact.

Searchers versus nonsearchers. It was also interesting that although searching adoptees reported their parents less willing to talk with them about the adoption, they also reported having more information about their birth families than did nonsearchers, findings which seem to agree with those of Aumend and Barrett (1984). It is possible that searchers are more sensitive to a lack of information and it is probable that they seek information on their own; that nonsearchers really have less interest in and desire for information. Searchers and nonsearchers also differed in how much information they felt appropriate for both adoptees and birth parents, with searchers supporting the right to more information in each case.

The fact that searchers possessed more information than nonsearchers seems confusing when considered in light of earlier speculations that information reduces diffusion but that search motivation indicates problems in identity formation. The fact that, in this study, search motivation did not interact with

either identity or diffusion raises some doubt concerning the hypothesized role of information about birth family in the identity process. It seems that perception of parental willingness to talk and desire for information may have had more influence on search motivation than the amount of information the adoptees actually possessed.

Nonsearching adoptees viewed the adoptive experience as presenting less difficulty in defining one's identity than did searching adoptees; in their viewpoints about the affective impact of adoption on identity, searchers were more negative than nonsearchers just as nonadoptees were more negative than adoptees in general. But in their ideas about information dissemination, nonsearchers responded more similarly to nonadoptees with searchers and adoptees generally favoring more information for both adoptees and birth parents. Nonsearchers seemed less negative about their adoptive experience and more negative toward their biological roots than did searchers.

Conclusions

It is important to keep some limitations of this study in mind. This was a sample of late adolescents and young adults and replication with a younger sample might produce different results. It is also probable that adoptees who volunteer to participate in self-disclosure about their adoptive experiences are systematically different in some ways from those who elect to not participate. In addition, the lack of rigorously tested

assessment tools to measure the developmental constructs and the limitations imposed through necessary restriction of the family and personal attributes to be considered, make it essential to use caution in drawing generalized conclusions. And finally, it is inappropriate to assume the correlational relationships obtained in this study represent cause and effect sequences since they may result from as yet undetermined more fundamental causes.

However, this study yielded some findings which seem to contribute to a better understanding of differences in development among adoptees and nonadoptees, and among searchers and nonsearchers. It appears that the development of identity, diffusion, intimacy, and isolation relates primarily to family and personal attributes for both males and females, searching and nonsearching adoptees, and for both adoptees and nonadoptees. Any impact of biological continuity or discontinuity seems to be modified by these factors. Personal attributes may be of more importance than family factors as sex, age, and anxiety were all individually significant effects, but only one family attribute (conflict) was individually significant, and its effects were restricted in scope. Search motivation does not seem to result from identity deficiencies but to be related to greater capacity for intimacy, more negative views of the adoptive experience, and more positive attitudes toward biological roots.

Some tentative conclusions seem appropriate. Speculation that adoptees are less successful in developing adult identities,

and that search motivation stems from developmental deficiencies, must be seriously questioned. Adoptees and nonadoptees do not appear to differ generally in developmental characteristics or in related personal and family factors. Developmental differences among individuals appear to be a function of differences in sex and age as modified by other family and personal attributes and not the consequence of generational continuity or discontinuity per se. Differences in relation to search motivation indicate searching may be more a function of capacity for intimacy than deficiency in identity resolution.

It appears that the taproots of identity are not bound in biology, but instead are nourished from sources such as personal and family attributes; and given that these sources are adequate, the taproots not only seem to survive being transplanted but to have the resiliency to flourish.

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Table 1

Significant Results for Adoptive Status MANOVA

Effect(Analysis)	Statistic(df)	p
Covariates(Multivariate)	$F(32,590)=1.75$	.01
Identity(Univariate)	$F(8,152)=3.19$	.01
Diffusion(Univariate)	$F(8,152)=3.03$	.01
Isolation(Univaraite)	$F(8,152)=2.47$	.01
Anxiety(Regression)		
Identity	$t(163)=-3.45$	.001
Diffusion	$t(163)=+3.08$	.01
Isolation	$t(163)=+3.16$	.01
Sex(multivariate-unadjusted)[1]	$F(4,157)=1.95$	.10*
Intimacy(univariate)	$F(1,160)=4.68$	.05
(follow-up) Females (N=115), $M=27.22$, $SD=3.81$		
Males (N=59), $M=25.74$, $SD=4.51$		
Adoptive Status x Anxiety(multivariate	$F(4,134)=3.00$	.05
Isolation(univariate)	$F(1,137)=7.49$	.01
(follow-up) Adoptees (N=83)	$r=+.40$	.001
Nonadoptees (N=81)	$r=+.09$	.22
Sex x Age(multivariate)	$F(4,134)=3.07$	.01
Isolation(univariate)	$F(1,137)=10.77$	.001
(follow-up) Females(N=115)	$r=-.07$	.22
Males(N=49)	$r=+.36$	.01

*Marginal significance

[1]The adjusted multivariate analyses for adoptive status and for sex were not significant.

Table 2

Significant Results for Search Motivation MANOVA

Effect(Analysis)	Statistic(df)	p
Covariates(Multivariate)	$F(32,266)=1.65$	.01
Identity(Univariate)	$F(8,71)=2.12$	.05
Diffusion(Univariate)	$F(8,71)=2.18$	.05
Isolation(Univariate)	$F(8,71)=2.64$	.01
Anxiety(Regression)		
Identity	$t(82)=-2.67$	.01
Diffusion	$t(82)=+2.21$	.05
Isolation	$t(82)=+3.49$	.001
Search x sex(Adjusted multivariate)	$F(4,68)=4.69$	.01
Intimacy(Univariate)	$F(1,71)=5.06$	.05
(Follow-up) Searchers Female(N=22), $M=27.09$, $SD=4.49$, Male(N=11), $M=27.90$, $SD=5.06$		
Nonsearchers Female(N=36), $M=28.31$, $SD=3.41$, Male(N=14), $M=23.93$, $SD=4.28$		
Search(Unadjusted multivariate)	$F(4,76)=3.38$	.01
Isolation(Univariate)	$F(1,79)=3.66$	.05
(Follow-up) Searchers(N=33), $M=13.85$, $SD=4.61$, Nonsearchers(N=50), $M=12.80$, $SD=3.84$		
Sex x age(Multivariate)	$F(4,53)=5.24$	.001
Intimacy(Univariate)	$F(1,56)=4.48$	.05
Isolation(Univariate)	$F(1,56)=3.61$	.06*
(Follow-up) Males, Age with Intimacy,Isolation	$r=+.30$, $r=+.38$	.07,.03
Females, Age with Intimacy,Isolation	$r=-.05$, $r=-.09$	.34,.26

Table 2 continued

Effect(Analysis)		Statistic(df)	p
Sex x Family conflict(Multivariate)		F(4,53)=2.62	.05
Intimacy(Univariate)		F(1,56)=6.92	.01
(Follow-up)	Intimacy with confict		
	Females, males	r=-.12, r=+.30	.18,.07
Anxiety(Multivariate)		F(4,53)=4.45	.01
Diffusion(Univariate)		F(1,56)=5.70	.05
Isolation(Univariate)		F(1,56)=4.28	.05
(Follow-up)	Diffusion with anxiety		
	Searchers, nonsearchers	r=+.26, r=+.33	.08, .03
	Females, males	r=+.29, r=+.26	.001, .03
	Isolation with anxiety		
	Searchers, nonsearchers	r=+.11, r=+.03	.30, .41
	Females, males	r=+.32, r=+.15	.000, .14

*Marginal significance

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations by Adoptive Status, Sex, Search

	Adoptees(N=83)						Nonadoptees(N=81)						Female(N=115)		Male(N=49)	
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total		Total		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age	25.50	6.10	25.00	5.40	25.34	5.87	24.70	5.92	24.75	5.93	24.71	5.88	25.10	6.00	24.88	9.60
Identity	26.15	4.71	25.60	4.21	25.98	4.54	26.09	4.06	25.45	3.43	25.90	3.87	26.12	4.37	25.53	3.80
Diffusion	18.47	3.68	17.76	4.23	18.25	3.84	17.75	3.30	18.20	3.49	17.89	3.35	18.11	3.50	17.98	3.85
Intimacy	27.85*	3.86	25.68	4.97	27.19	4.31	26.60	3.67	25.79	4.09	26.36	3.80	27.22*	3.81	25.74	4.51
Isolation	12.40	4.18	13.72	4.27	12.79	4.23	13.03	3.27	14.04	3.81	13.33	3.45	12.71	3.76	13.88*	4.01
Cohesion	5.85	2.85	5.64	2.53	5.78	2.75	6.80	2.20	6.67	2.78	6.76*	2.37	6.32	2.58	6.14	2.67
Expression	4.43	2.53	4.12	2.02	4.33	2.38	5.02	2.12	5.00	2.04	5.01*	2.08	4.72	2.34	4.55	2.06
Control	3.60	2.43	3.92	2.60	3.70	2.47	3.33	2.41	3.29	2.77	3.32	2.50	3.47	2.41	3.61	2.68
Independence	6.29	1.98	6.76	1.39	6.43	1.82	6.52	1.79	6.67	1.55	6.57	1.71	6.41	1.89	6.71	1.46
Conflict	5.15	2.41	4.84	1.60	5.06	2.19	4.86	2.40	4.20	2.51	4.67	2.43	5.01	2.40	4.53	2.10
Anxiety	5.48	1.46	5.39	1.14	5.46	1.36	5.63	1.29	5.72	1.30	5.66	1.28	5.55	1.37	5.55	1.21
Autonomy/ Independence	.93	1.09	.63	1.34	.85	1.17	1.05	1.16	1.11	1.34	1.06	1.14	.99	1.12	.87	1.25

Table 3 continued

	Searchers(N=33)						Nonsearchers(N=50)					
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Identity	25.46	4.84	27.18	4.36	26.03	4.69	26.58	4.64	24.35	3.80	25.96	4.50
Diffusion	19.59	3.98	17.90	3.56	19.03	3.88	17.78	3.35	17.64	4.81	17.74	3.76
Intimacy	27.09	4.49	27.90	5.07	27.36	4.63	28.41*	3.41	23.93	4.28	27.08	4.14
Isolation	13.18	4.27	15.18	5.19	13.85*	4.61	11.92	4.11	12.57	3.13	12.10	3.84
Cohesion	4.18	3.02	5.27	2.57	4.55	2.88	6.86	2.23	5.93	2.56	6.60*	2.34
Expression	2.86	1.72	3.63	2.24	3.12	1.91	5.39	2.48	4.50	1.82	5.14*	2.33
Control	4.13*	2.35	4.00	2.86	4.09	2.49	3.28	2.45	3.85	2.47	3.44	2.44
Independence	5.40	2.28	6.46	1.70	5.76	2.13	6.83	1.58	7.00	1.10	6.88*	1.45
Conflict	6.13	2.45	4.55	1.21	5.60*	2.23	4.56	2.21	5.07	1.86	4.70	2.11
Anxiety	5.67	1.68	5.10	1.15	5.49	1.53	5.36	1.32	5.62	1.12	5.43	1.26
Autonomy/ Independence	.69	1.22	.87	1.26	.76	1.22	1.09*	.99	.45	1.40	.90	1.14

* Female nonsearchers higher than males on intimacy ($p<.0004$) and on autonomy/ independence ($p<.08$), female searchers higher on family control ($p<.05$) than males, searchers were higher than nonsearchers on isolation ($p<.06$) and family conflict ($p<.06$), and nonsearchers were higher than searchers on family cohesion ($p<.0006$), family expressiveness ($p<.0001$), and family encouragement of independence ($p<.0005$).

* Female adoptees were higher than males on intimacy ($p<.03$) as were females compared to males generally ($p<.03$), males were higher than females on isolation ($p<.07$), and nonadoptees were higher than adoptees on family cohesion ($p<.01$) and family expressiveness ($p<.05$).